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Nathan Leites

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# STALIN AS AN INTELLECTUAL\*

By NATHAN LEITES

**D**URING Stalin's lifetime Soviet writing, with his encouragement, presented him as a master theoretician, without a living peer. The more recent tendency on the part of his successors to reduce reference to this and others of his roles has not amounted to a denial of the earlier theme of intellectual greatness. It may therefore be of some importance, even after his death, to investigate Stalin's theoretical writings, not only to clarify his function and accomplishments as an intellectual, but also to gain further insight into Bolshevik and Soviet patterns of thought. A particularly interesting subject for such an investigation is Stalin's last and most widely heralded theoretical writing, the article, "Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R."

Well-timed to remind the Soviet world of Stalin's undiminished leadership despite his reduced role at the Nineteenth Party Congress, the article appeared in the October 1952 issue of *Bol'shevik*.<sup>1</sup> It had a peculiar history. Having been requested by the "Central Committee" to help in the preparation of an official economics textbook, a number of Soviet economists had by November 1951 prepared a draft and held a discussion of it, which resulted in various documents proposing revisions of the draft. The first section of Stalin's article, dated February 1, 1952, begins as follows:

I have received all the documents on the economics discussion held in connection with the evaluation of the draft of a textbook of political economy. . . . I consider it necessary to make the following observations on all of these documents and on the draft of the textbook (p. 1).

These "Remarks on Economic Questions Connected with the November Discussion of 1951" were in their turn circulated among economists, some of whom wrote letters to Stalin and re-

\* The author is indebted to Hans Speier, Victor Hunt, Paul Kecskemeti, Melville Ruggles, and Raymond Garthoff for their comments and criticisms.

<sup>1</sup> Stalin, "Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.," *Bol'shevik*, No. 18 (October 1952). All quotations in this paper are taken from the translation in the Special Supplement to the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, October 18, 1952, with page references indicated in the text.

ceived answers from him. Three such answers (to A. I. Notkin, dated April 21, 1952; to L. D. Yaroshenko, dated May 22, 1952; and to A. V. Sanina and V. G. Venzher, dated September 28, 1952) form the rest of his article.

This subsequent publication of communications and even of "debates" between Stalin and technocrats of a medium level is itself a very interesting phenomenon. In 1950 the same procedure was used in Stalin's "theoretical" writings on linguistics, and in 1947 in his letter on military affairs to a professional military historian. These incidents open up speculation as to the extent of such communications and the degree to which Stalin was involved in them. While we cannot definitely assume the existence of other unpublished Stalin writings of this nature, it is indeed possible that they may exist, and that Stalin may have intervened in such matters more than is commonly supposed.

## I

To Stalin (although he was of course not fully aware of this) the links between a scientific term and the objects it designates, as well as its links with other terms, are not conventional, but almost as real as the world itself. Words, for him, somehow possess "magical" power, even in scientific discourse. For example, take Stalin's reply to Notkin's criticism of his "Remarks." Stalin had narrowly circumscribed the sphere within which the "law of value" operates in the contemporary Soviet economy, and Notkin had objected that (in Stalin's paraphrase) "the law of value exercises a regulatory effect on the prices of 'the means of production' . . . [namely] raw materials—cotton, for instance." Stalin replies:

. . . in the given case agriculture produces not "means of production," but one of the means of production—raw materials. One cannot play with the words "means of production" (*sredstva proizvodstva*). When Marxists speak of production of the means of production they mean primarily production of tools of production (*orudii proizvodstva*). . . . To equate part of the means of production (the raw materials) with the means of production, including the tools of production, is to sin against Marxism, because Marxism proceeds from the determinative role of the tools of production as compared with all other means of

production. Everybody knows that raw materials in themselves cannot produce tools of production; . . . on the other hand, no raw material can be produced without tools of production (p. 11).

In this incredible passage Stalin treats what pretends to be scientific language as one would treat a ceremonial formula. He conveys the feeling that the straightforward use of a general term (means of production) might "destroy" a top priority of Soviet economic policy, namely, that given to the production of tools of production. Notkin simply designates a member (raw materials) of a class (means of production) by the name of that class (means of production). He does not add that there is another member (tools of production) of the same class which is in certain respects (given the system of priorities of Soviet economic policy) much more important than the member he deals with. For he deals with this member (raw materials) with a view to a particular question: to which kind of goods does the "law of value" apply in the Soviet economy? And this would make it irrelevant to do what Stalin demands, namely, to mention another member (tools of production) of the same class (means of production) and to recall how much more important, in certain respects, that latter member is. For Stalin, this logically appropriate "silence" appears to have a negative, "destructive" effect, since Stalin, in characteristic Bolshevik fashion,<sup>3</sup> denies the possibility of a stable intermediate position between full acceptance of a proposition (in this case, of the properties of "tools of production") and its complete rejection. Moreover, by stressing this distinction, Stalin is able to emphasize the difference between capitalism and Soviet socialism (and, conversely, Notkin blurs the distinction, and hence the difference, between economic systems).

Or take Stalin's reaction to the views of Yaroshenko (another of his correspondents) about the relation between "productive

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Nathan Leites and Elsa Bernaut, *The Ritual of Liquidation*, RAND Research Memorandum RM-977 (forthcoming publication by The Free Press, Glencoe, Ill.), ch. 21, on Bolshevik attitudes toward "silence."

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Nathan Leites, *A Study of Bolshevism*, RAND Report R-239 (forthcoming publication by The Free Press), ch. 18, sections 3 and 4, and Leites and Bernaut, *op.cit.*, chs. 4, 10, and 13, on Bolshevik disbelief in the stability of intermediate positions.

forces" and "production relations" under socialism. The first term, *Produktivkräfte*, was used by Marx to designate the resources and technology available to a society; by the second, *Produktionsverhältnisse*, he designated the social relations among the members of society engaged in economic activity. Stalin notes with displeasure Yaroshenko's affirmation that under socialism "production relations constitute part of the . . . productive forces." Later in this article we will discuss this affirmation as an expression of Yaroshenko's technocratic bent. We may add that it is, to be sure, both unorthodox Marxism in text and unintelligible in meaning. But Stalin is concerned only with the violation of orthodoxy—which is quite obvious to anybody conversant with Marxist formulae—and proceeds to utilize it in a fashion which again shows his profound belief in the "magic" of words. He recalls a famous passage from Marx, according to which the sum total of "production relations" constitutes the "economic structure" of society, its "real base" or, in Stalin's paraphrase, its "economic base." Stalin continues:

This means that . . . every social formation . . . has its economic base, consisting of the sum total of . . . production relations. The question arises, what *happens* to the economic base of the socialist system in Comrade Yaroshenko's interpretation? As we have seen, Comrade Yaroshenko has . . . *liquidated* production relations under socialism as . . . [an] independent matter and lumped the little that remained of them with the . . . productive forces. One asks: *Has* the socialist system its own economic base? Evidently the socialist system is *left without* its economic base, since production relations have disappeared under socialism as a more or less independent force.

Consequently, here is the socialist system without its economic base. This is a funny state of affairs.

Is it possible to have a social order without an economic base? . . . Marxism holds that such social systems don't happen (p. 14; italics mine).

To Stalin, then, Yaroshenko's prediction that under "socialism" "production relations" will constitute part of the "productive forces" means that "production relations" will be annihilated by incorporation. That is, Yaroshenko's elimination of the term "production relations" in a proposed theory of socialism signifies to Stalin, somehow, the (theoretical) destruction of the

"economic base" of socialism,<sup>4</sup> inasmuch as Marx defines the term "economic base" with the help of the term "production relations." To be sure, Stalin is not entirely convinced of the correctness of this line of reasoning (which makes Yaroshenko appear to be a supreme "wrecker"), as he uses his argument at the same time for a *reductio ad absurdum* (which makes Yaroshenko appear a rather harmless fool). But this second line, too, equates the elimination of a term with the disappearance of its referent. It is probable that Stalin's discussion in both its variants is consciously motivated by a determination to "liquidate" Yaroshenko intellectually. But it is also very likely that Stalin does not regard the modes of reasoning he uses as just plain silly, which would be the judgment of Western empirical scientists.<sup>5</sup>

As words are of such intrinsic importance to Stalin, and as they have, apparently, "true" rather than conventionally assigned definitions, it becomes a central intellectual operation to distinguish between words—that is, to classify objects—rather than to discover the conditions and consequences of events. Again and again, as in the past,<sup>6</sup> Stalin constructs intellectually by creating distinctions (classes of objects) and destroys intellectually by charging others with having failed to make, or to apply, the proper distinctions.<sup>7</sup> Thus, according to Stalin, some econo-

<sup>4</sup> Stalin's process of identifying the omission or elimination of a term with the destruction of the object to which it refers is not, of course, fully conscious. And Stalin is probably deliberately using verbal trickery. But there is almost always more to any manifest content than mere fabrication, and the choice of content of verbal trickery in a way reflects its author's obscure beliefs.

<sup>5</sup> In similar fashion, Stalin reifies the Marxist term "expanded reproduction," i.e., an expanding economy. He affirms that one of the "basic preliminary conditions" for the "transition to communism" is the "constant growth of all social production," and that this in turn requires "preponderant growth of production of means of production." This, in turn, "is necessary not only because it [the producers' goods industry] must provide equipment for its own enterprises and for enterprises of all other branches of the economy as well, but also because without it, it is altogether impossible to have expanded reproduction" (p. 14). Stalin overlooks, first, that the last reason is both necessary and sufficient; and, second, that the first two reasons are, together, identical with the last: by an expanding economy ("expanded reproduction") one means (except in the case of certain technological changes) an economy with expanded equipment in whatever branches the economy is expanding.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Leites, *op.cit.*, ch. 4, section 3.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, ch. 11, section 1, for discussion of the relation of this device to the fantasy of communism as the abolition of distinctions.

mists "are confusing scientific laws . . . with laws promulgated by governments. . . . These two kinds of laws cannot be confused at all" (p. 1). It is quite true that a distinction of categories is necessary to scientific thought, but it is not sufficient by itself. Yet Stalin seems to assume that the entire field of intellectual endeavor can be exhausted merely by making distinctions; he does not recognize this as merely a preliminary operation. In his discussion, Stalin compounds this unconscious error by a combative, polemical (and unfair) attribution to Yaroshenko of very elementary equivocation in terms, in order to "annihilate" him intellectually. Thus, in this instance, the "distinction" made by Stalin (which Yaroshenko is ridiculed for not making) is simply not germane to the question at issue.

In discussing those economists who are in favor of the abolition of "commodity production" in the Soviet Union (cf. pp. 23-25), Stalin mentions that they cite in their favor a passage of Engels: "Once society takes over the means of production, commodity production will be abolished. . . ." Stalin immediately proceeds to make a distinction: "Engels' formula . . . contains no indication whether it refers to society's taking over *all* the means of production or only part of them . . ." (p. 3).

The rest of his argument is based on (or, rather, is tautological in relation to) this distinction. It is in the same fashion that Stalin discusses the assertion of some economists that the present structure of Soviet economy creates tendencies toward the restoration of capitalism (cf. p. 27):

It is said that commodity production . . . necessarily will lead to capitalism under any circumstances whatsoever. Not always and not under all conditions! Commodity production must not be confused with capitalist production. They are two different things (p. 3).

. . . those comrades are entirely wrong who say that since socialist society does not liquidate the commodity forms of production, all the economic categories characteristic of capitalism . . . must also be re-established in our country. These comrades confuse commodity production with capitalist production . . . (p. 4).

Or take Stalin's polemic against Yaroshenko who, according to Stalin, "reduces the problems of political economy of socialism

to problems of rational organization of productive forces, . . . of planning the national economy, etc. [*sic*]”:

. . . he is utterly wrong. The problems of rational organization of productive forces, of planning the national economy, and so on, do not constitute the subject of political economy (*politicheskaiia ekonomia*), but the subject of the economic policy (*khozaistvennaia politika*) of the directing agencies. These are two distinct areas which must not be confused. Comrade Yaroshenko confused these two different things and went astray. Political economy studies the laws of development of . . . production relations. Economic policy draws practical conclusions therefrom. . . . To burden political economy with problems of economic policy is to nullify it as a science (p. 16).

Again, the incorrect use of terms induces “disaster”—first in theory, then in practice. Thus Stalin may fear that, in Yaroshenko’s perspective, Soviet planners (and ultimately the leadership) will be made to appear omnipotent—and hence more responsible for chronic shortages than they really are. If there remain “economic” restraints and limitations upon action even under socialism, the regime will have good alibis. Hence we must emphasize these constraints in our teaching about Soviet economy, and we can do this only by using “political economy.”

Discussing his correspondents Sanina and Venzher, Stalin mentions a proposal of theirs on agricultural policy:

Citing Stalin’s statement that the means of production are not to be sold even to the collective farms, the authors of the proposal question Stalin’s thesis, maintaining that the state . . . does sell . . . to the collective farms, such means of production as minor equipment—scythes, sickles, small motors, and so on. They reason that if the state sells these means of production to the collective farms it could also sell them all the other means of production, such as the Machine and Tractor Stations’ machinery (p. 19).

In replying, Stalin alludes in a relatively straightforward fashion to the vast difference in economic and political consequences of the two arrangements envisaged; but, in order to clinch his argument, he again talks about words:

. . . when Stalin spoke of not selling the means of production to collective farms, he had in mind not small equipment but the basic means of agricultural production—the M.T.S. machinery and the land. The authors are playing with the words “means of production” and confusing two different things without noticing that they end up being muddled (*ibid.*).



That Stalin is incapable of seeing the difference between classifications and propositions (indicating the conditions and consequences of the occurrence of events belonging to certain classes) becomes clear when he discusses Marx's "theory of reproduction" set forth in the second volume of *Das Kapital*. For the purposes of his analysis, Marx distinguishes between the production of means of production and that of means of consumption; Stalin speaks about this classification as the "division" of social production into these two sectors, and calls this "division" a "basic proposition of Marx's theory of reproduction."

If words are so important, merely rendering the meaning explicit becomes an operation hardly distinguishable from the establishment of a statement about relationships between events. In fact, all the further "basic propositions" of Marx's theory of reproduction which Stalin names follow directly from the definitions of the terms used and from the assumptions made in this theory, as a more detailed analysis would show.<sup>8</sup>

"As is well known" (to use a favorite Bolshevik phrase), Stalin minds truisms overweighted by explicitness and repetition no more than he does tautologies. In prescribing the final shape of the textbook on economics whose on-going production occasioned his article, he says:

... what is required is a textbook which could serve as a handbook of revolutionary youth. . . . It should not be too voluminous, since too large a textbook cannot be a handbook, and it would be difficult to assimilate—to master. But it should contain all that is basic . . . (p. 10).

A rather extreme case in point is Stalin's lengthy discussion to the effect that only the "essential" and not "all" the differences between city and country and between mental and manual "labor" will disappear in communism. Stalin writes:

Some comrades assert that in time not only the essential distinction between industry and agriculture, between manual and mental labor, will disappear, but that *any* difference between them will also disappear. . . . Elimination of the essential difference between industry and agriculture cannot lead to elimination of all distinction between the two. Some

<sup>8</sup> Stalin speaks of "the thesis of the predominant growth of production of the means of production under augmented reproduction"; "the thesis of the surplus product as the only source of accumulation;" "the thesis of accumulation as the only source of augmented reproduction" (p. 17).

sort of difference (*kakoe-to razlichie*), albeit nonessential, undoubtedly will remain, in view of the difference in working conditions in industry and agriculture. Even in industry conditions of work are not the same . . . in its various branches; the working conditions of coal miners, for example, differ from those of the workers of a mechanized shoe factory, the working conditions of ore miners differ from those of machine-building workers. If this is correct, even more so is the fact that a certain difference (*izvestnoe razlichie*) between industry and agriculture must remain.

The same applies to the difference between mental and manual labor. . . . some sort of a difference . . . will remain, if only because the working conditions of the managing personnel of enterprises are not the same as those of the workers (p. 6).

In a way which epitomizes certain long-term trends in the Western world, Stalin reduces Marx's obscure and solemn philosophical prophecy of the restitution of man's plenitude to the lucid affirmation that, whatever the social order, hours spent working in a coal mine will not be exactly identical to hours spent working in a shoe factory. For instance, in the first case one is working underground; in the second, one may still be aboveground.

Tautologies are used as "evidence" for empirical hypotheses, as in the case of Stalin's treatment of "the question of the material condition of the working class in the capitalist countries":

When we speak of the material situation of the working class, we usually . . . do not take account of the . . . unemployed. [That we should, is a truism.] Is such an attitude to the question of the material situation of the working class correct? I think it is wrong. If there exists a reserve army of unemployed . . . [they] cannot fail to be included in the working class, but if they are included in the working class, their plight cannot fail to influence the material situation of those workers engaged in production. [According to the preceding sentences, the "influence" would occur by definition rather than by causation.] I think, therefore, that in characterizing the material situation of the working class in the capitalist countries one should take into account the situation of the reserve army of unemployed [a statement which is tautological in relation to the definition of "working class" given above] (p. 9).

The defects in Stalin's logic are accompanied by a good deal of ignorance and distortion in his substantive Marxism. This is shown in startling fashion when he discusses the view of some economists that "the law of the average profit norm" is the

“basic economic law” of “contemporary capitalism.” (This search for such a single law is not traditional in Marxism; it expresses the Stalinist desire for simplification and—to apply a Marxist hypothesis—“reflects” the autocratic nature of the Soviet regime.) What these Soviet economists presumably have in mind is a part of the third volume of *Das Kapital*. There Marx shows that in view of the different distribution of total cost between wages and other costs in different industries, there is a tendency toward different rates of profit in them; but that the mechanism of free competition tends to establish an average rate of profit throughout the economy. “Average” is thus for Marx, in this context, a term referring entirely to differences between various industries; Marx’s definition of “the average rate of profit” carries no implication as to its absolute magnitude. (In a related proposition, Marx affirms that the “average rate of profit” tends to decline through time.) Stalin, however, shows that he has never read or understood, has forgotten or distorted in memory, the third volume of *Das Kapital* and the many discussions of these points in Marxist literature. For he takes the word “average” as it appears in the term “average rate of profit” in the sense of an absolute magnitude which is neither high nor low. That is, instead of using the term “average” in a neutral quantitative sense, he uses it in an emotional and moral sense. Substantively, he apparently means to speak of devices used by capitalists (imperialistic competition, in this “highest stage in the development of capitalism”) in an effort to ward off (or, to the Marxist, to postpone) the tendency of the profit rate to decline. But this is so stated as to appear to mean that capitalists are greedy for “maximum” exploitable profit. He says:

Present-day capitalism, monopoly capitalism, cannot be satisfied by an average (*sredni*) profit which, besides, shows a tendency to decline. . . . Present-day monopoly capital demands not an average profit but a maximum profit. . . .

Average profit is the lowest limit of profitability below which capitalist production becomes impossible. . . . it would be ludicrous to assume that the magnates of present-day monopoly capitalism, when they seize colonies, enslave peoples and foment wars, are seeking to guarantee themselves merely an average profit. No, it is not average profit, and

not superprofit, which "as a rule" is merely a certain increase over average profit, but it is maximum (*maksimal'naia*) profit which is the motive power of monopoly capitalism (p. 8).<sup>9</sup>

It is consonant with the illiteracy which Stalin shows in the passages quoted that his own formulation of the "basic economic law of capitalism" shows a further decline from the earlier Marxist tradition of phrasing central propositions of economics in more or less neutral and technical fashion. This is Stalin's discovery:

The main features and demands of the basic economic law of present-day capitalism could be formulated roughly as follows: to secure the maximum capitalist profit through the exploitation, ruin and impoverishment of the majority of the population of a given country, through the enslavement and systematic robbing of the peoples of other countries . . . and finally through wars and the militarization of the national economy which are used to guarantee the highest profits (p. 8).

If Bukharin had read this passage in the mid-1930's without any indication of its origin, he would probably have guessed that it was taken from an elementary course of instruction intended for candidates for Party membership in a backward region of the Soviet Union. And surely, whatever the precise character of his reaction, he would have responded very similarly to Stalin's parallel discovery about "socialism" (characteristically worded in parallel fashion):

The essential characteristics and requirements of the basic economic law of socialism might be formulated roughly as follows: to assure maximum satisfaction of the constantly growing material and cultural requirements of all of society through the constant growth and improvement of socialist production on the basis of the highest technology (p. 9).

We see here again Stalin's predilection for pleonasms and repetition. Perhaps he believes this method is justified by his desire

<sup>9</sup> Stalin's central mistake makes him miss the connection by virtue of which a Marxist could say that the transition to "monopoly capitalism" qualified the theorem of the establishment of an average rate of profit: the mechanism by which this comes about, in Marx's presentation, is free competition. One may also note that Stalin introduces two almost undefined terms, "maximum profit" and "superprofit." He treats the latter—by the locution "as a rule"—as if it were well defined, but the content of his allusion shows that is not so. The conspicuous role in this passage of words of contemporary Communist mass propaganda, as distinct from terms of Marxist economics, is commented upon below.

to create a formula which will be usable both on the level of "theory" and of "agitation"—a demonstration of the disappearance of differences between these levels in Stalinism. In the first of these quotations, for example, Stalin speaks of "capitalist profit," although in Marxism profit is defined for capitalism only. Further, according to Marxism, any "profit," not just "maximum" profit, is based on exploitation. The relation of "robbing"—a term used for the economic aspects of capitalist acts in "other countries"—to the three previous synonyms, which are used for the domestic economic activities of capitalists, is not clear; or, rather, it is clear that all four terms have the same referent. While the entire passage is intended as an enumeration of devices used to attain "maximum profits," this term is repeated at the end of the last-named device ("militarization of the national economy"), with the elegant substitution of *naivishchaia* (highest) for *maksimal'naia* (maximum). The second quotation equally displays tautologies, pleonasms, and truisms; it could have ended with the word "society" without being any poorer in meaning.

Malenkov's reaction to the enunciation of these "laws" is not surprising: "Comrade Stalin's discovery . . . is a tremendous contribution to Marxian political economy . . ."; it "deals a devastating blow to all apologists of capitalism. . . ." And, "Comrade Stalin's theoretical discoveries are of world-historic significance" (p. 8).<sup>10</sup> Malenkov even goes so far as to acclaim as a "discovery" of Stalin's what Stalin himself presents as a basic point of "historical materialism," explicitly stated by Marx in the famous preface to *Zur Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* (1859), a preface which Stalin himself quotes in part. There Marx affirms that the relation between *Produktivkräfte* and *Produktionsverhältnisse* is a basic factor in society. He points out how the latter, in a "class society," will first "enter into a relation of contradic-

<sup>10</sup> This and subsequent quotations from Malenkov's speech at the Nineteenth Party Congress are taken from *Bol'shevik*, No. 19 (October 1952), pp. 58-59.

The degree of adulation of Stalin displayed by a Malenkov (a member of the top group) was, however, smaller than that adopted by a Mikoyan (a member of the next lower group). A detailed analysis would probably show the persistence of the pattern discussed in the article by Nathan Leites, Elsa Bernaut, and Raymond Garthoff, "Politburo Images of Stalin," *World Politics*, III (April 1951), *passim*.

tion to the former," and then become adapted to them (through "revolution"). It is this very well-known point which Stalin calls "the economic law of the obligatory conformity (*obiazatelnoi sootvetstvie*) of production relations to the character of the productive forces" (p. 2), and which Malenkov dares to say that Stalin "discovered."

We have discussed Stalin's emphatic criticism of those who allegedly "confuse" laws of science and of government. In this connection, it seems significant that in formulating Marx's point about the relation between "productive forces" and "production relations" Stalin stresses the validity of this alleged law of science by using a term which is unusual in such a context and whose associations are overwhelmingly governmental: "obligatory." Malenkov may have reacted to an obscure awareness of this when he added in the context just quoted another term which is unambiguously science-oriented: he attributes to Stalin the discovery of the "objective economic law of the obligatory conformity. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

While Stalin's intellectual level seems to have reached a new low in this article, his adherence to certain basic Bolshevik beliefs seems quite unshaken.

As we shall note later, Stalin opposes those economists who demand an immediate elimination of the remaining sector of "commodity production" in the Soviet Union. On the other hand, he emphatically affirms the necessity of ultimately going to yet further extremes of central control, and of starting to move now. While he does not say that the present, as it were, intermediate, situation is acutely unstable, he affirms that it is less desirable than a yet further extension of direct state regulation. In place of the present "two basic production sectors," the "State-public form" in industry and the "collective farm form" in agriculture, a "single united sector" must be established (p. 4); that is, "it is essential . . . to raise collective farm property to the level of property of the public as a whole" (p. 14). And,

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Thus Stalin's emphasis on the point that scientific laws "cover processes independently of people's will" appears here particularly clearly as a (no doubt largely unconscious) maneuver in the Bolshevik fight against fantasies of omnipotence. (Cf. Leites, *op.cit.*, ch. 1, section 4.)

in connection with this, "it is essential . . . to replace commodity turnover (*tovarnoe obrashchenie*) with a system of exchange of goods (*produktoobmen*) . . ." (p. 14), for "commodity turnover is incompatible with the prospect of transition from socialism to communism" (p. 19).

The two projected developments are interrelated:

In order to raise the level of collective farm property to the level of public property it is necessary to take surplus collective farm production out of the system of commodity turnover and include it in the system of product exchange between state industry and the collective farms . . . so that the collective farms would receive for their products not only [*sic*] money but primarily articles they need (p. 20).

This change should be introduced—and here Stalin expresses the Bolshevik opposition to both procrastination<sup>12</sup> and precipitance<sup>13</sup>—

. . . without particular haste . . . [but] steadily, unwaveringly, without hesitation, step by step reducing the sphere of operation of commodity turnover and increasing the sphere of operation of product exchange (*ibid.*).

The determination to achieve these changes seems in part related to the conception of "communism" as excluding anything less than "public" property of all goods other than consumer goods,<sup>14</sup> and as abolishing the use of money:<sup>15</sup>

. . . we Marxists base ourselves on the well-known Marxist thesis that the transition from socialism to communism and [*sic*] the communist principle of distribution of goods according to needs exclude any commodity turnover (*tovarny obmen*) . . . (pp. 19-20).

But Stalin appears to have another acknowledged motive (which he, surely, does not distinguish from the one just named) in asking for the changes which we have described: he feels the need to abolish what at least on the surface seem to be limitations on the control of the central organs of the regime over the

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Leites, *op.cit.*, ch. 6, section 4.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, ch. 4, section 2.

<sup>14</sup> Stalin's adherence to the Marxist view of property as the central variable in social life is expressed when he discusses the still persisting "differences" between city and countryside in the Soviet Union (p. 6).

<sup>15</sup> Malenkov repeats and stresses Stalin's point (against the economists who oppose it) that in communism "money economy" will disappear, and says that the view that "commodity circulation (*tovarnoe obrashchenie*) will persist under communism has nothing in common with Marxism" (p. 8).

economic life of the Soviet Union. Thus he describes the terminal state to be attained as one

... when, in place of the [present] two basic production sectors [state industry and the collective farms], one comprehensive [*vseobemliushchy*; literally, all-embracing] sector appears, with the right to distribute all the consumers' goods produced . . . (p. 4).

More explicitly, he discloses that

... it is essential . . . to raise collective farm property to the level of property of the public as a whole . . . and to replace commodity turnover with a system of exchange of goods . . . so that the central authority (*tsentral'naiia vlast'*) or some other social-economic central agency (*tsentr*)<sup>16</sup> might control the entire output of social production . . . (p. 14).

Stalin takes it as axiomatic that there is a positive correlation, in the Soviet economy, between the degree of central control and the rate of "development of our productive forces": the present institutions which he condemns (for the long run) "act as a brake" on that "development" "inasmuch as they are creating obstacles to full coverage of the entire economy . . . by state planning" (p. 15).<sup>17</sup>

The fantasy of total power thus remains as dominant as ever in Stalin's mind<sup>18</sup> in this "first phase of the development of communist society."<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Stalin reaffirms the forecast of the disappearance of the state: ". . . the state will not exist forever. With the expansion of . . . socialism in the majority of countries of the world, the state will wither away. . . . The state will disappear but society will remain. It follows that the recipient of public property will . . . no longer be the state, which will have disappeared, but society itself as represented by its central guiding economic agency" (p. 18).

<sup>17</sup> More specifically, Stalin says that the replacement of the present relations between the collective farms and the state by direct exchange, in which the kolkhozes deliver produce and receive certain assortments of industrial products in return, "will make it possible to include . . . the yield of collective farming in the general system of national planning" (p. 20). In usual fashion, Stalin additionally justifies these, as any other, economic changes by their alleged favorable impact on the "productive forces" (p. 15).

<sup>18</sup> It may be significant that, in contrast to Stalin's verbal orthodoxy about the goal (cf. note 16), Beria on one occasion at the Party Congress chose a formulation which might indicate a reduction of faith within the Politburo. He speaks of "the one great goal—the strengthening of the might of our Fatherland and the victory of communism."

<sup>19</sup> On one occasion Stalin seems to abolish in a fashion which is both spectacular and casual the dominant current description of the present phase as one in which the Soviet Union is engaged in a "movement on the road of gradual transition from socialism to communism," by speaking of "our present economic system, in the first phase of the development of communist society . . ." (p. 5).



## II

Stalin's article not only reflects upon his ability as a theoretician and his make-up as an intellectual, but also reveals certain patterns of thought current among the technical intelligentsia. These patterns deserve attention.

In condemning various opinions expressed by Soviet economists, Stalin acquaints us—by alleged paraphrase and even quotation—with dissenting moods in the intelligentsia.<sup>20</sup> According to Stalin's presentation, such moods are invariably expressed—whether the disguise be consciously or unconsciously adopted—through “left” enthusiasm<sup>21</sup> or through ostensibly innocuous divergences on technicalities; but Stalin seems to sense the discontent latent in the “preposterous balderdash” of some “hare-brained ‘Marxist’ ” (p. 15).<sup>22</sup>

Apparently discontented with the present state of affairs in the Soviet Union, some members of the intelligentsia seem to see the root of the trouble in the fact that the Party has not gone far enough toward “communism.” For example, take the matter of “commodity production.” This arrangement gives the officials of a kolkhoz a certain “property” right over the produce of the collective farm, a freedom of choice in disposing of this produce, even though the land and machinery of the kolkhoz are state property.<sup>23</sup> Proposing the abolition of this freedom—that is, the extension of the state “property rights” to cover the produce of

<sup>20</sup> The other leaders whose statements we are discussing and who often mention Stalin's article tend to be silent about this aspect of it, showing the late Stalinist aversion to acknowledging the existence of non-conformity. But Poskrëbyshev notes that Stalin discusses “the mistakes and anti-Marxist tendency of some economists.”

<sup>21</sup> This enables Mikoyan to summarize Stalin's polemic as follows: “Comrade Stalin . . . poured cold water on those comrades who have let themselves be carried away, whom our great successes made dizzy.”

<sup>22</sup> Stalin's use of such terms as “preposterous balderdash” in a technical-ideological discussion reveals a low opinion of his subordinates, often displayed in other ways (cf. Leites, *op.cit.*, ch. 1, section 4; and Leites and Bernaut, *op.cit.*, chs. 1-4). Elsewhere in his article Stalin states that, in the matter of setting certain prices, “Our managers and planners submitted a proposal which could only astonish the members of the Central Committee. . . . The authors of the proposal found nothing sensible to say to the remarks of members of the Central Committee. . . . As a result, the Central Committee had to take matters into its own hands . . .” (p. 5).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Philip Mosely, “The Nineteenth Party Congress,” *Foreign Affairs*, xxxi (January 1953), pp. 249-50, for another discussion of this particular point on agricultural economics.

the kolkhoz as well—some members of the Soviet intelligentsia virtually expressed, in 1951, the view that the Party should never have replaced War Communism by the New Economic Policy thirty years before:

Some persons assert that the Party acted wrongly in retaining commodity production after the Party assumed power and nationalized the means of production. . . . They consider that the Party should have abolished commodity production then and there. In saying this they cite Engels, who states:

"Once society takes over the means of production, commodity production will be abolished . . ." (pp. 2-3).

And again:

It is said that after the predominance of public ownership of the means of production was established . . . , commodity production . . . should have been abolished (p. 4).

The "left" Bolsheviks of 1951 also seem to take up another view of the "left" opponents of the NEP in 1921: they predict that the "sectors," or even the "remnants," of "commodity production" which are permitted to exist will grow out of control and lead to the "restoration of capitalism" in the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> According to Stalin, there are comrades

who say that since socialist society [i.e., the Soviet Union today] does not liquidate the commodity forms of production, all the economic categories characteristic of capitalism—labor as a commodity, surplus value, capital, profit from capital . . . —must also be re-established in our country (p. 4).

That is,

It is said that commodity production . . . must and necessarily will lead to capitalism under any circumstances whatsoever (p. 3).<sup>25</sup>

We will by now not be surprised to hear that the ultra-"lefts" of the early 1920's who affirmed that the party leadership had

<sup>24</sup> The existence of such views in the Party in the early 1950's seems to confirm the Bolshevik apprehension that remnants—in this case, of "oppositions"—will never die. (Cf. Leites *op.cit.*, ch. 18, section 3; and Leites and Bernaut, *op.cit.*, ch. 10.)

<sup>25</sup> In opposing the views which we have just indicated, Stalin takes up a position identical with that assumed by Lenin in 1921 when he defended the introduction of the New Economic Policy. Stalin denies in 1952, as Lenin did in 1921, that the introduction or retention of certain limited aspects of "capitalism" will inevitably lead to its full "restoration" in the Soviet Union, and that the presence of a certain degree of "commodity production" in the Soviet Union is a necessary concession to the peasantry.

introduced "state capitalism" have found successors in the early 1950's; though, of course, these successors have to use conditional language<sup>26</sup> and may often manage to deceive themselves. According to Stalin, there are Bolshevik economists who apply to the Soviet economy

notions which are borrowed from Marx' analysis of capitalism . . . such concepts as "necessary" and "surplus" labor, "necessary" and "surplus" goods, "necessary" and "surplus" time (p. 4).

—implying, as Stalin points out, that

under our conditions the labor the workers give to society for expanding production, developing education and public health, organizing defense . . . [is] not just as necessary to the working class . . . as labor expended on satisfying the personal needs of the worker and his family (*ibid.*).

These party economists also "speak of labor as a commodity or labor 'for hire' " (*ibid.*). Since, and again Stalin points this out, it would be "absurd" to say of a "working class owning the means of production" that it is "hiring itself and selling its labor to itself," the implication is clear: in the USSR today, according to these economists, the workers do not "own the means of production"; they do not "hold power"; the bureaucrats do. And the interests of these bureaucrats (served by the workers' "surplus labor") and the interests of the workers do not coincide.

Similar views seem to be held by A. I. Notkin, the recipient of a published answer to an unpublished letter he had written to Stalin. To him Stalin says:

From your arguments it follows that you regard the means of production . . . which are produced by our nationalized enterprises as commodities (p. 11).

—which, as Stalin indicates, would seem to imply that

directors of [nationalized] enterprises which have obtained means of production from the state . . . become their owners . . . (*ibid.*).

That is, Notkin reaches the conclusion that "the economic categories of capitalism . . . preserve their validity in our economics" (*ibid.*).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Leites and Bernaut, *op.cit.*, ch. 3, section 2.

<sup>27</sup> Stalin replies in conventional Marxist fashion that, while the "forms" of "the old categories of capitalism" remain, their "content" or essence has been changed under socialism (p. 11).

In the Bolshevik view, those who advocate a much more rapid tempo of advance toward "communism" than that adopted by the Party come up against the question of whether or not it is within the power of the "subjective factor" to do the great things which should be done; and they tend to answer this question affirmatively. This will in turn dispose them to qualify or deny the existence of an "objective" law of Soviet society which would limit the power of the Party leadership over events.<sup>28</sup> Malenkov makes explicit this connection between a desire to advance too quickly and an underestimation of the limiting role of social "laws": "Negation of the objective character of economic laws is the ideological basis of adventurism in economic policy . . ." (p. 8). To this we might add a point which is tabu in the statements we are analyzing, namely, that the inclination toward "adventurism" is often related to a more or less conscious disaffection with the existing state of affairs.<sup>29</sup> It is in this light that we might interpret, in part, the shocked conservative tone of Stalin's discussion<sup>30</sup> of the affirmation of the Promethean "lefts" that the Party leadership can create, modify, and destroy "economic laws."<sup>31</sup> According to Stalin,

Some comrades deny the objective nature of . . . the laws of political economy under socialism. . . . In view of the special role allotted by history to the Soviet state, they hold, the Soviet state and its leaders can negate existing laws of political economy, can "establish" new laws, "make" new laws (p. 1).

<sup>28</sup> In opposing this attitude, Stalin brings forward the classical Bolshevik point that omnipotence fantasies make for impotence (cf. Leites, *op.cit.*, ch. 6): "Let us suppose for a minute that we took the point of view of the mistaken theory which . . . proclaims the possibility of 'creating' and 'changing' economic laws. Where would that lead? It would lead to finding ourselves in the realm of chaos and chance; we would find ourselves slavishly dependent on chance occurrences" (p. 18).

<sup>29</sup> In contrast, Stalin alleges about those who currently manifest "left" moods: ". . . young cadres . . . are amazed by the colossal achievements of the Soviet regime, their heads are turned by the extraordinary successes of the Soviet system and they begin to imagine that the Soviet regime 'can do anything,' that 'everything is child's play' to it . . ." (p. 2).

<sup>30</sup> In other situations, Stalin's emphasis has been in the opposite direction: in the early 1930's he stressed the belief that "there are no fortresses which a Bolshevik cannot conquer." (Cf. Leites, *op.cit.*, ch. 1, section 4.)

<sup>31</sup> There is apparently also a corresponding "right" mood—only incidentally treated by Stalin—which affirms man's impotence in the face of scientific laws rather than his omnipotence: "It is said that economic laws are of a spontaneous nature, that their effects are unavoidable, that society is powerless against them" (p. 2).

Stalin rejects not only this view, but also its weaker variant, according to which it is possible to "change" laws:

It is said that certain economic laws which operate in our country under socialism . . . are "changed" or even "radically changed" [as against what they were under capitalism]. . . . This is also wrong. It is impossible to "change" laws, and "radically," at that. If it is possible to "change" them it is also possible to abolish them and substitute other laws.<sup>32</sup> The proposition that laws can be "changed" is an echo of the incorrect theory that they can be "negated" and "made". . . . It is possible to limit the scope of operation of various laws; . . . but the laws can neither be "changed" nor "abolished" (p. 2).

It seems likely that (whatever the degree, or lack, of consciousness on the part of the participants) the real issue is the desirability and possibility of "negating," "abolishing," "changing" the status quo, and "substituting," "establishing," "making" something else.<sup>33</sup>

While some members of the intelligentsia thus seem to seek a way out of the unsatisfactory present by a more rapid and radical application of the social principles of communism, others—in a "right" mood—appear to wish for a reduction or cessation of Bolshevik political interference with the job of production, which they seem to conceive in a "technocratic" manner. Thus,

Comrade Yaroshenko . . . greatly exaggerates the role of the productive forces [the technical aspects of production], similarly excessively underrates the role of production relations [the social aspects of production] and caps matters by proclaiming production relations under socialism to be part of the productive forces.

Comrade Yaroshenko is willing to grant something of a role to production relations under the circumstances of "antagonistic class contradictions" [*sic*]. . . . He limits this role, however, to a negative one, that of a factor retarding the development of productive forces, fettering their development.

[According to Yaroshenko] "The main problem of the political economy of socialism therefore *is not* to study the production relations of the people of a socialist society *but is* to work out and develop a scientific theory of the organization of the productive forces in social production. . . ."

<sup>32</sup> This is an instance of the Bolshevik lack of belief in the existence of middle views.

<sup>33</sup> Stalin also opposes what he views as excessive differentiations between "socialism-communism" on the one hand and "capitalism" on the other—possibly yet further disguises of a "left" discontent with the Soviet status quo.

. . . Comrade Yaroshenko is not interested in such economic questions of the socialist order as the existence of varied forms of property in our economy, commodity turnover, the law of value, and so on, considering them to be secondary questions entailing purely academic arguments. He states plainly that in his political economy of socialism "disputes over the role of this or that element in the political economy of socialism (value, commodity, money, credit, et al.)—disputes which, among us, frequently acquire a pedantic character—will be *replaced* by a common sense discussion of the rational organization of productive forces. . . ."

. . . He bluntly declares that "under socialism the basic struggle in the establishment of a communist society consists only in the struggle for correct organization of the productive forces. . . ." Comrade Yaroshenko solemnly announces that "communism is the highest scientific organization of productive forces in social production" (p. 13).

Stalin comments:

Our literature contains another definition, another formula for communism, namely, Lenin's formula: "Communism is Soviet rule plus the electrification of the whole country." Evidently Comrade Yaroshenko does not like Lenin's formula . . . (p. 14).

Evidently, indeed, Yaroshenko does not care as much for "Soviets" as for "electrification"; more generally, he does not care as much for politics as for production (or for consumption either). He goes so far as to disagree openly with Stalin's formulation of the "basic law of socialism," saying:

Production is presented here [by Stalin] as a means for attaining this chief aim of satisfying needs. . . . your [Stalin's] formulation of the basic economic law of socialism is based not on the primacy of production but on the primacy of consumption (p. 16).

Stalin can thus comment:

He [Yaroshenko] turns production from a means into a goal. . . . What we get, then, is production for growth of production, production as its own *raison d'être* . . . (p. 17).

Although disagreements and relatively free discussion among economists (within the confines of Soviet Marxism) have been known to exist before, this published account of them by Stalin acquaints us with a veiled dissatisfaction inherent in the debates. However, two points need to be made in connection with this disclosure:

(1) The "right" religion of production and the "left" devotion to a system of complete state ownership of production means and yield may both, in part, be ways of protesting against Soviet reality. But it should be noted that this veiled dissatisfaction on the part of at least a segment of the intelligentsia probably exists *within* a fundamental acceptance of the regime and system, and not as a protest against them.

(2) The very fact, evident in this published exchange between Stalin and certain second-level economists, that these critics felt free to disagree with Stalin and apparently suffered no severe punishment is of considerable interest. It seems to suggest that in certain respects, Stalin felt a degree of security which hitherto had been only rarely and inconsistently in evidence.